DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 104 359 IR 001 751

AUTHOR Carter, Marion L.
TITLE Storytelling Notes.
PUB DATE Feb 75
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Utah Educational Media Association (Ogden, Utah, January 31-February 1, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Children; Dramatic Play; Evaluation Criteria; *Guidelines; Selection; Speeches; Speech Skills; *Story Telling; Tales; Visual Aids

ABSTRACT

Storytelling is a shared experience between the teller and the listeners. The two basic concerns of the storyteller are to choose good stories and to make the telling interesting and exciting. Selection of a story should be based on the criteria of good plot and characters, an authentic setting, appropriate dialog, and appeal to the listerners' experience. Beyond this, the proposed audience will affect the choice of story. When very young children are concerned, brevity is best with an emphasis on visual aids and action. The storyteller can enhance his own and the audience's experience if he likes his stories, creates an imaginative and friendly atmosphere, and practices voice and dramatic techniques which will facilitate his performance. (Author/SL)

ED104359

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

STORYTELLING NOTES

Marion L. Carter

I am very pleased that so many of you are interested in keeping alive the old, old tradition of storytelling. As you know, storytelling was one of the earliest means of communication among the people of a society. Not only was it the medium through which they shared experiences and taught the customs and mores of a society, but it was a superb form of entertainment. And there are still areas of the world in which storytelling is the major form of entertainment. In Africa and West Indies, as soon as the sun goes down, the people in the village gather in a designated place to hear the best storyteller.

Now, more and more, we are beginning to rediscover the art of storytelling and its value as a sharing experience. As the well known storyteller, Diane Wolsteine, has related, in the West Indies and Africa storytelling is very much a sharing experience between the storyteller and the listeners. Before any actual storytelling begins, there is a kind of interchange between the storyteller and the audience in which the listeners spur the storyteller on. This urging is done in the form of a call and a response in which the storyteller begins by calling out CRACK! and the people answer back CREAK! and then the storyteller begins sharing a story with his or her listeners.

I hope that you will look upon the time you spend here this evening as a "sharing experience." I don't think you can teach someone to tell stories but you can share ideas and experiences with someone else and if they have the basic qualities of a good storyteller, imagination, enthusiasm, concentration, and sincere joy in the sharing process, they can take these ideas and experiences, adapt them in their own unique way and, through sharing, pass them on to others and in this way the wonderful art of storytelling can go on and on. So, LET'S BEGIN OUR SHARING.....

IR 001751

Each one of you should have a green booklet and this blue leaflet. Obviously, time does not permit us to do more than an overall survey of the art of storytelling and that is why this is called an introduction to storytelling. On the first two pages of the green booklet is a summary of the things we are going to cover this evening. As we go along, I will tell some stories to demonstrate different points. I am aware that some of you are interested in stories for one age group and others of you in stories for another age group, so I will try to use stories which cover different age groups. But, the same general principles of good storytelling apply regardless of the age group you are telling the story to.

The two basic things which concern a storyteller are choosing good stories to tell and making the telling interesting and exciting.

CHOOSING THE STORY

Not all stories are good to tell, so you must decide "What makes a story good to tell?" One famous storyteller said "The story that lives makes a story good to tell and the story that lives is the story that catches and holds the interest of the children and, the more it lives for them, the more excited they will get about it. And they will be flying through the air with Mary Poppins or bounding alonside of the Fast Sooner Hound."

Now, how can you tell whether a story will really live for your listeners. There are some generally accepted criteria you can look for to help you decide.

1. GOOD PLOT

   First of all the story that lives has a good plot with something of interest to resolve. The plot line is so clear that anyone wanting to tell it can easily recognize and follow it. And all the incidents chosen to unfold the plot should be relevant to the main action so that the main action goes on uninterrupted. The children, or whomever your listeners are, will have no difficulty in recognizing what the story is about and following it to the end, if the story has a good plot.

2. GOOD CHARACTERS

The characters must be true to what they are supposed to be and real enough so that you care what happens to the. If a story has good characters, the listener will be able to easily identify with the main characters. How many of you have told a story and afterwards had a child come up and say that he did something like one of the characters in the story or that he has a toy or pet like one mentioned in the story When this happens, then you know that the story has good characters that the child can identify with.

3. AUTHENTIC SETTING

To live, a story must have an authentic setting. That is, unless the place where the story happens and the time it happens is just right, the story will not ring true and will not live. For example, the rabbit hole in ALICE IN WONDERLAND was like a real rabbit hole and Laura's log cabin home in LITTLE HOUSE IN THE BIG WOODS is a real log cabin sitting in the Wisconsin woods. These are examples of stories which have authentic settings.

4. GOOD CHOICE OF WORDS

The words you use in telling your story must fit both the characters and the time period of the story. For example, if a story is about a big, mean, Giant, you can't have the giant saying, "Oh, please don't step on me, you might crush me." (spoken in a tiny, scared voice). Or, you could not have King Arthur saying, "That's cool, man, cool." or "That really blew my mind."

5. UNIVERSAL APPEAL

But, there is something beyond good plot, good characters, authentic setting, and a good choice of words. The story that truly lives has a certain plus factor that makes it become a part of you. This plus element is called Universal Appeal. Universal Appeal means there is something in the story, at some point, that is the distillation of many children's (or young adults or adults-- whomever the story is told for) experience. All listeners

bring to all stories their own experience and they identify with any story at the point where it hooks on to some meaningful experience of their own. Then, they live the story and it becomes a story that truly lives for its listeners. For example, every child knows what it is to want attention so they will identify with the little girls in this book, MADELINE. Madeline received so much attention after her appendicitis operation that all the other little girls in the Paris convent where she lives suddenly become ill themselves. And that is the way children will act in real life -- if a brother or sister receives a lot of attention when he or she is sick, the other child will suddenly become sick too. Another experience which most five or six year old children share is the loss of a first tooth -- an experience they can share with Sal in ONE MORNING IN MAINE. Ping's tardiness and George's curiosity are likewise so universal that many children can identify with the little Chinese duck in STORY OF PING and the little monkey in CURIOUS GEORGE as fully as they might if Ping and George were children instead of animals.

A story may be realistic, a tale of fantasy, a funny story, a tall tale but, it must live to be worth telling.

Now, let me give you an example of a story with all the characteristics that make a live: good plot, good characters, authentic setting, good choice of words, and that plus element, universal appeal. It is a good story to tell to all children three years old and older. It is called THE PEDDLER AND HIS CAPS.

TELL STORY/ THE PEDDLER AND HIS CAPS

(After telling, talk about plot development and identification with the monkey's because children all over the world know what it is to tease and be teased; the authenticity of the village setting; how the words used fit the character of the peddler and the TSK TSK sound is similar to monkey's chatter.

Discuss the similarity of the story to music with an introducton, main problem or theme, theme developed by contrast and repetition, and how the problem or theme is finally resolved and finished with a coda. Mention that this story has been used in literature classes because of its perfect form.)

YOUR AUDIENCE

Your reason for telling the story and who your audience is will affect your choice of story. In one sense a good story appeals to all ages, but you choose different stories for varying age groups because of the difference in the children's responses and because of the experiences they can relate to. Where very young children are concerned, brevity is an important factor because their attention span is too short to sit still for very long. Visual aids are also important because they add to the understanding of the stories. Because little children's responses are largely motor responses, they respond very well to stories with repetition or rhythm and you will notice that you can use a longer story if it has repetition because of the sense of movement inherent in the story. Many repetitive stories do not necessitate the child sitting still; they can be enhanced by the children participating in them by moving their hands and heads. For this reason, audience participation and rhythm, stories like THE GINGER BREAD MAN (run run fast as you can; you can't catch me, I'm the ginger bread man), MILLIONS OF CATS (cats here, cats there, hundreds of cats, thousands of cats, millions of cats), and THE PEDDLER AND HIS CAPS (on top of his head he put his old brown cap....) have remained perennial favorites with children.

The kinds of stories you will choose for young children are 1) picture book stories for brevity and visual experience; 2) flannel board stories which again offer a visual experience; 3) story games and fingerplays which are short verse stories they can participate in; and 4) rhythmic prose stories which have an inherent sense of motion children can respond to.

1. PICTURE BOOKS

A good example of a picture book story that lives is WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE by Maurice Sendak. This is the story of Max, a little boy who is sent to bed without his supper for acting like a Wild Thing and dreams that he sails to the land where the wild things are.

TELL STORY/ WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

(It is in the experience of many children to be punished for being naughty, to want to make their parents sorry by running away, and yet, at the same time, want the security of being home.)

Children everywhere know that animals do not wear clothes and this simple little book, ANIMALS SHOULD DEFINITELY NOT WEAR CLOTHING, delightfully tells why.

TELL STORY/ ANIMALS SHOULD DEFINITELY NOT WEAR CLOTHING

We could obviously spend hours discussing picture books alone but since time does not permit this, let me just say that the older and more sophisticated the child becomes, the less pictures should simply take the place of words but should accompany them and interpret them. For these older children, increasing weight must be given to the method of representation as well as spontaneity and sincerity. The blue leaflet, which was used by the Children's Room in a lecture on picture books, will be a useful guide to looking at picture books. As you can see, it discusses how to judge a picture book and lists books as examples of varieties of art techniques, the use of color, good art as a means of communicating information, inanimate objects as animate objects, animals as central characters, and tugging in the moral.

2. FLANNEL BOARD STORIES

A flannel board story which can be used with children five years old and over is this Halloween story called STRANGE COMPANY. It not only offers a visual experience, it is also repetitive and offers a chance for the children to participate. (Have the audience take the part of the children.)

TELL STORY/ STRANGE COMPANY

3. STORY GAMES AND FINGERPLAYS

Two good books of story games and fingerplays are LET'S DO FINGERPLAYS and FINGERPLAYS AND ACTION RHYMES. Story games or fingerplays are good stories to use with children who can't sit quietly and listen to you tell a story or to give children a chance to move around after they have been sitting quietly listening to a story. If you are going to tell children several stories, be sure to give them a chance to move around before starting the second story. A story game or fingerplay gives them the chance to relax from sitting still but keeps them in a story mood.

TELL STORY/ THE BEAR WENT OVER THE MOUNTAIN

****
10 MINUTE BREAK
****

HELPFUL THINGS TO REMEMBER TO IMPROVE YOUR STORYTELLING

1. LIKE YOUR STORY

Tell the stories you are excited about. Now, why is it so important that you like the story you tell? It is because you, the storyteller, are the medium through which the story comes to life for your listeners and they will know when you are excited about your story and they will pick up your excitement. Never tell a story that you don't like. One

of the biggest mistakes the beginning storyteller makes is thinking that there are certain stories he or she should tell whether or not they really like them. Remember, not all stories, even good ones, belong to each of us and no one can tell a story well if that story is not a part of him or herself. The listening children will always know whether the story you tell is your story. When it is your story and the communication is good, you may get comments such as "She's the best storyteller there is." or "I like the story the way you told it." So, I cannot stress enough, you must like your story and enjoy telling it.

2. CREATE A FRIENDLY ATMOSPHERE

A little earlier we talked about children being able to identify with something in the story. In addition, the children must also be able to identify with you, the storyteller. They must feel that you are a friend who wants to give them real pleasure by sharing a story with them. There are many ways in which you can create a friendly atmosphere. For example: a) sit the children close to you; b) if possible, set the stage with a prettily decorated table, posters on the wall for older audiences, and have music playing as they come in; and c) a good way to get a group of children into a happy listening mood is to sing songs together -- songs such as "This Old Man He Played One," "Tree in the Wood," and "Twelve Days of Christmas" will quickly put the children in a relaxed, happy mood. With a little imagination, I am sure you can think of a number of different things to do to create a friendly atmosphere.

3. DEVELOP A PLEASING VOICE

It is important to try to develop a pleasing, flexible voice because your voice is the instrument you use to share a story. A clear low pitched voice is best for storytelling. This means using the lower ranges of your own voice. If you have a high thin voice you should practice developing your lower range by speaking clearly and distinctly so that your lis-

teners do not have difficulty in understanding you, and the story, or they will become restless and you will lose them as listeners. The easiest way to find out how your voice sounds to your listeners is to get a tape recorder and record your voice and play it back -- you cannot tell how you sound by merely talking out loud because we cannot hear our voice, as others hear it, while we are speaking. Now you may say OH NO! But, if your voice does need improving, listening to it on a tape recorder will give you the incentive to work at improving it. Your voice should be flexible enough so that you can easily vary the pitch and volume and change emotions quickly. For example, in a tender or eerie part of a story, the voice should become soft but, in a strong, exciting moment your voice should grow louder (but never become rasping or harsh to the listener's ears). The voice is generally pitched higher and lighter to express joy and lower and heavier when expressing sorrow. But, these changes in pitch should be in proportion so that you do not get a continual up and down sound but a smooth transition from one level to another. Unless you work at varying the pitch, strength, and emotional intensity of your voice, your voice will be a boring monotone.

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS AND HAVE THEM DO THE DICTIONARY EXERCISE

(The dictionary exercise is a way in which you can learn to project different emotions by choosing words at random in the dictionary and saying them in a variety of emotional ways such as love, anger, sorrow, happiness, etc.)

4. BE IMAGINATIVE

To be imaginative is to be sensitive to the ways in which the most can be made of a story without destroying its artistic beauty. For example, children are often delighted by simple descriptive nuances. Take the two phrases "It's cold outside." and "He was a mean old man." You can give

them color by reading them this way (DEMONSTRATE). Enjoy words, play with them as a musician plays with sounds. We can learn much from children here for children play with sounds and with words. They often enjoy words as much for their sound as for their meaning.

5. GESTURES

Another way of being imaginative in your storytelling is with the use of gestures. Good use of gestures can add sparkle to a story. For example, "The great bird lifted his wings and flew away." (DEMONSTRATE GOOD GESTURE AND BAD GESTURE.) There are no specific gestures anyone can teach you to use in expressing an emotion or incident. If you naturally use certain gestures to express joy or anger, use them. Basically, the thing to remember is that if you are free and wholly at ease in your story, your body will take care of itself. Whatever you do must be your natural way of expressing yourself and must be characteristic of the story and must fit the size of your audience. (DEMONSTRATE.)

6. TIMING

Timing is an important element in imaginative storytelling. In the straight narrative part of the story your pace may be a slow trot, but in deeply emotional parts you will slow down to a walk and in an exciting part with lots of action you will break out into a run. Pace yourself to the pace of the story.

7. PAUSES

Pauses are also an important element in telling a story. A pause can be used to let the listener grasp the full impact of a moment or to make what follows more surprising. Descriptive passages may be written into a story to give the reader a brief pause from the action. The Irish call these descriptive passages RUNS -- because they give a person a chance to catch his breath.

9. DON'T OVERDRAMATIZE

Remember, if at the end of your storytelling, the audience remembers you and what you did, but not the stories, you overacted.

10. VARY YOUR STORYTELLING

During any given storytelling period, tell a variety of stories. Perhaps a funny story, a picture book story, a scary story, a gentle story -- don't let all of your stories be alike in tone.

11. POLISH YOUR STORYTELLING

Go over and over your story and be sure to practice saying your story aloud. The first time I had to tell stories I practiced silently so as not to disturb anyone and almost fainted at the sound of my own voice when I began telling the stories. Go back occasionally to stories that you didn't like very much to see if you have changed your feelings about them. Remember, the more you tell a story, the more it becomes a part of you and the better you will be able to tell that story.

These are only a few suggestions on what you can do to improve your storytelling, each of you must find out what works the best for you.

A FEW STORIES

And now, let's end this program with a few stories.

WAUKEA'S EAGLE An American Indian legend that older children will like.

EUREKA, I HAVE FOUND IT. A story based on Archimede's discovery that an object will displace its weight in water.

STORY BAG: Volunteers pick objects out of the story bag --

THE BABY BEEBEE BIRD (picture book story)

THE WOLF'S TAIL (folktale)